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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how videotapes of C-SPAN programs were used to aid research and teaching of cross-cultural issues related to United States-China relations. The specific focus of the C-SPAN programs discussed was the reaction in the United States to the Chinese pro-democracy movement. The use of C-SPAN resource can benefit student understanding in a variety of courses in the communication arts curriculum including mass media, cross-cultural communication, interpersonal communication, and public speaking. (DB)

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ANALYZING REACTION IN THE U.S. TO THE CHINESE PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT USING C-SPAN AS A DATA BASE

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BIO

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ABSTRACT

This article describes methodology used to analyze reaction in the U.S. to the Chinese pro-democracy movement. Analysis is based on tapes obtained from the C-SPAN public affairs cable network. A total of 21 programs (23 tapes) were analyzed in this study. Tapes were selected from an annotated list of 82 programs provided by the Public Affairs Video Archives at Purdue University.

Programs were primarily interpreted according to high context/low context messaging evidenced in the tapes. Application of findings from this analysis can benefit student understanding in a variety of courses in the communication arts curriculum. Such courses include Mass Media, Persuasion, Cross-Cultural Communication, Rhetorical Communication Theory, Interpersonal Communication, and Public Speaking. C-SPAN is a representative objective forum because it does not promote a political agenda.

ANALYZING REACTION IN THE U.S. TO THE CHINESE PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT USING C-SPAN AS A DATA BASE

In recent years the academic community has recognized C-SPAN (Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network) as a valuable teaching tool in the classroom. This article will describe how C-SPAN can be used for communications oriented research. Such application is exemplified by using my research entitled "Reaction in the U.S. to the Chinese Pro-democracy Movement." Discussion of this undertaking emphasizes methodology, thus enabling readers to realize possible applications in their own research areas. The primary method described stresses descriptive analysis of C-SPAN tapes obtained from the Public Affairs Video Archives at Purdue University.

Within my research area, cross-cultural issues related to U.S.-China relations, I have focused on reaction in the U.S. to the Chinese pro-democracy movement using C-SPAN as a representative forum for discussion on the issue. The types of programs analyzed are described later in this article. C-SPAN is a representative forum because it does not promote a political agenda. I will present this project in sequential steps.

1) I contacted the Public Affairs Video Archives at Purdue University and requested a selected listing of programs dealing with reforms in China. Tapes of all C-SPAN programs since 1987 are indexed at the Archives and are available from the organization. They prepared and sent me an annotated list of 82 programs (ranging in time from 30

minutes to ten hours and ranging in cost from $30 to $275).

2) Twenty-two programs were selected based on their relevance to the Chinese pro-democracy movement. Types of programs included forums, news conferences, speeches to the National Press Club, roundtables, speeches, House Committees, call-in shows, House Highlights, Congressional News Conferences, Senate Committees, and book reviews. These programs are listed in the bibliography. The more relevant programs are noted in the discussion of classroom applications.

3) While viewing the tapes I prepared notes and, based on observed consistencies, decided to interpret the tapes through analysis of the high context/low context messaging. That is, the high context channels of communication used by Chinese speakers conflicted with low context channels of communication used by Americans. Chinese speakers typically use high context channels of communication that tend to be less direct and heavily reliant on nonverbal messages. Meaning evolves from context. American speakers typically use low context channels of communication that tend to be more direct and based on literal verbal statements. One can more easily understand the intended meaning without considering context.

This illustrates a standard cross-cultural communication dynamic. Cross-cultural misunderstanding can easily occur when interactants are using different channels on the high context-low context continuum. Analysis focused on

statements by President Bush, U.S. political representatives, Chinese students studying in the U.S., Chinese diplomatic representatives, and the American public. Analysis of these statements consistently reveals the Chinese preference for high context messages and the U.S. preference for low context messages.

The following situation exemplifies the importance of context when analyzing Chinese communication. During the period of June 1-7, 1989 (the Tianeman Square shootings occurred on June 3) there was much confusion regarding who was in control of the Chinese government and what their position would be toward political and economic reform in China. There were rumors Chinese leader Deng Xiaopeng was dead and civil war was imminent. American politicians frequently made direct statements in support of the pro-democracy movement and called for the Chinese government to allow reform. The C-SPAN program "China Debate" (June 22, 1989) includes such low context messages. The Chinese government released no statements to clarify the situation.

However, when Chinese Premier Li Peng (a conservative hard-liner) appeared on Chinese national television wearing a "Chairman Mao uniform" instead of the more common western business suit, viewers could easily interpret the government's position. The context (what he was wearing) spoke far louder than what he was doing (performing ceremonial protocol). The "Chairman Mao uniform" was popular during the conservative reign of Chairman Mao Tse Tung. The

fact Premier Li Peng appeared on Chinese national television wearing such clothing indicated he was in charge and that he was a conservative leader. Nothing needed to be stated. In a low context culture such as the United States, we would expect our leader to state his/her position rather than to have to interpret intentions based on clothing.

4) Finding from this analysis can benefit student understanding in a variety of courses in the communication arts curriculum including Mass Media, Persuasion, Cross-Cultural Communication, Rhetorical Communication Theory, Interpersonal Communication, and Public Speaking. This can be done by stressing examples of pertinent course concepts evidenced in the C-SPAN tapes.

In the Persuasion course, I emphasize the importance of diplomatic dialogue between nations, especially when the nations are in disagreement. The C-SPAN program "Bush Policy Toward China" (December 12, 1989) describes National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft's trip to China and President Bush's policy of maintaining dialogue. This situation illuminates the relevance of diplomatic dialogue and it exemplifies high context rapport.

In the Mass Media course, I emphasize the goal of objectivity stressed by news organizations. The C-SPAN program "China" (March 6, 1990) featured Mortimer Zuckerman (Editor-in-Chief of U.S. News and World Report) discussing their 1989 cover story "Inside China: The First Interviews with China's Leaders Since Tianeman Square." His discussion

clarifies the concern with objectivity, accuracy, and journalistic resourcefulness. It also exemplifies the role of U.S. media when they translate high context messages from Chinese leaders into low context meanings sought by the American audience.

In the Cross-Cultural Communication course, the influence of societal frames of reference are emphasized. China is a socialist nation and the U.S. is capitalist. The C-SPAN program "Sino-U.S. Relations" (March 9, 1988) features a speech by Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xuequian. His speech describes China's reforming economy and it's opening to the outside world. His subject exemplifies the difficulty of two systems, who have differing societal frames of reference, being able to find common ground. The high context messages of intention enhance this process. What applies at the international level frequently applies at the interpersonal level.

There are many who argue scholarly research is done at the expense of time that can be put toward effective teaching. Use of C-SPAN in the aforementioned manner allows the faculty member to meet both objectives competently. Analysis of C-SPAN programming allows the faculty member to pursue significant scholarly research. As described in this article, such scholarly research has relevance in the classroom and findings from this research are appropriate for scholarly publication.

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